

KYP

KEEPING YOU POSTED

Headline news for busy
church editors

"Connecting the Gospel and Justice to Media, Churches and Community."

November 1996

Here is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for congregational publications, with topical news of the wider church, helpful hints to strengthen members' faith and pride in the denomination and personal testimonies to stir the spirit. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter. The code at the end of some entries refers interested readers to a more comprehensive story in *United Church News*.

REFLECTIONS OF THE MILLION MAN MARCH – "The only thing that mattered was that a 14-year-old African-American boy, who had been labeled 'an endangered species' by sensitive sociologists, had gotten to witness a million Black men standing together." So writes the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, pastor of **Trinity UCC, Chicago**, in a new book published by the UCC's Pilgrim Press. *Atonement, The Million Man March* is the story, in their own words, of a cross-section of participants to that historic witness.

"Never before had I seen so many Black people together at one time," writes another observer. "It was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen."

A student remembers that the million men on the Washington Mall "inspired me to become the best that I can in everything."

Added another thoughtful spectator, "As African-American men, we needed a day of atonement – a time when we could say to ourselves that the problems we face as a people can only be solved by ourselves."

For anyone who wants an insider's understanding of the meaning and power of this event, this is the book to read. Check your local bookseller.

THERE'S ONE IN EVERY WINDOW – The September issue of *Life* magazine features a dramatic picture of the citizens of Billings, Mont., lined up on the main street, each holding a menorah (candelabrum). It is a symbol of the community's defiance of hate groups that had attacked Jewish homes with rock throwing and racist graffiti.

In the city of 85,000, there are only about 100 Jews. But when skinheads hurled a cinder block through 5-year-old Isaac Schnitzer's bedroom window, destroying his menorah, the town dug in its heels.

Margaret MacDonald, head of the state council of churches, a member of **First Congregational UCC**, and assistant moderator of the 1997 UCC General Synod, persuaded her church to distribute some 200 paper menorahs for members to hang in their windows. "I remembered what the Danes did in World War II," she said. "When the Nazis forced Jews to wear a yellow Star of David, every Dane wore one."

But the 200 menorahs did not stop the hate. There were more rocks, a dead cat and vandalism. The community redoubled its efforts and soon there were 10,000 paper menorahs fluttering in as many windows. The terror stopped. "It made a big impression on the children," says MacDonald. "They saw adults taking risks and a courageous stand for minorities." This all happened in 1993. The photo was taken last year by a French photographer documenting the Jewish diaspora, and has just been released for publication. MacDonald has been honored by human rights groups throughout the country. The photo is also reproduced on the center pages of the November issue of *United Church News*.

PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST? – What will it take to get the peace process back on track between Palestinians and Israelis? "Not the belligerent repetition of fixed positions but a genuine striving for agreement and compromise," write the Rev. Paul H. Sherry, UCC President, and other Christian leaders in a letter to President Clinton. The letter was timed to coincide with a meeting in Washington between Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat and Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The Clinton-brokered meeting came after the outbreak of violence triggered by the Israeli opening of a tunnel under the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, holy sites sacred to Christians, Muslims and Jews.

But Israel is more the key to maintaining peace, said Dale Bishop, the UCC's Middle East mission executive who drafted the letter. One good place to start would be to close the tunnel, an area of "extreme sensitivity." It would also help if Israel redeployed its troops from the Palestinian city of Hebron, as it had promised to do in the Oslo agreements, says Bishop, and to stop expanding new settlements, which it told the Bush administration it would do. "We fear that both Israelis and Palestinians will suffer more losses if the underlying causes of the violence are not addressed," the church leaders said in the letter.

SOME GOOD (FINANCIAL) NEWS – For years, the UCC has reported that male parish clergy make substantially more money than their female counterparts. For 1995 and 1996, the Pension Boards reports that the gap is about 20 percent. But these figures only survey churches which are members of the pension plan. So the research staff of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries analyzed information from all churches that report to the UCC Yearbook office, and those figures look better. In the 1990s, female clergy have made more than 90 cents for every dollar male clergy made. Sheila Kelly, Minister for Research Information for the Homeland Board, says that for the first time, there were enough women serving as pastors to make such a study possible. (About one of every four UCC clergy are women, and about 30 percent of those women are pastors of local churches.)

The Pension Boards member figures for 1996 do reveal that the Florida Conference pays the most generous salaries and that, nationwide, seven more women (for a total of 27) joined the \$50,000 club. Wouldn't it be nice if clergywomen's pay equaled men's? And in a similar vein, wouldn't it be nice if all the churches subscribed to the General Synod recommended 14 percent annuity payments?

A CHRISTMAS BONUS – One good reason to purchase *The New Century Hymnal* is that it almost doubles the number of Advent hymns from previous editions (23, up from a previous average of 13). With four Sundays to cover during Advent and with an average of three hymns a service, a congregation can easily run out of source material, points out *A Cappella*, newsletter of the UCC Musicians Network.

Keeping You Posted is edited by William C. Winslow and produced monthly by the UCC Office of Communication, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115-1100. Visit us on the World Wide Web at <<http://www.ucc.org>>.

Send story ideas to: William C. Winslow, UCC Office of Communication, 475 Riverside Dr., 16th fl., New York, NY 10115. E-mail: WILLIAM.WINSLOW@ecunet.org

SOMEBODY LIKES US – The *Washington Post* likes us, or at least it likes our web site on the Internet. The paper crowed about the UCC home page on the World Wide Web as “one of the most colorful and varied denominational sites.” Home pages are like theater marquis or a book jacket. The first part of a home page often contains a table of contents for the web site. They are a form of promotion and a forum of information on the Internet, the electronic highway by which individual computers throughout the world talk to each other.

The UCC home page gives a brief description of the denomination, provides regularly updated information on the work of the various national agencies, posts denominational press releases, prints an electronic version of *Keeping You Posted*, as well as articles from *United Church News*. There is also information on the history of the UCC and links to other religious home pages. Computer users with access to the World Wide Web can read and download material with this address: <<http://www.ucc.org>>.

KEEP IN TOUCH – Thanksgiving is the first time many college students will return home this year. If they have a church life, will they show up for worship? Or, will their religious life gradually recede while they are at school?

That might depend upon how successfully the local church has stayed in touch. Does your church send its newsletter and the weekly bulletin to its students? Sometimes such a mailing is as close to regular contact with home as a student gets. And don't forget special announcements of programs of interest to students. A more recent form of communication is the computer. With an E-mail address, a general message can be custom tailored (“Congratulations on your making the Dean's list, Sylvia,” for example), and there is opportunity for two-way dialogue. There might be a pastor's chat or even a counseling service. Students can also look up the UCC home page on the World Wide Web. And finally, a church can give a student's name – with permission – to a UCC church in the college town or to the school campus ministry or chaplain. Students appreciate when they feel they are still a part of their hometown spiritual communities.

FACTS ON FOOD STAMPS – Food stamps, like other welfare programs, have been taking it on the chin this election year. But the UCC Hunger Action Office says food stamps are a bargain. The average meal costs only 72 cents. What could you buy with less than a buck? Potato chips? Cheese doodles? Surprise! Food stamp recipients buy less junk food than the rest of us. Nor do the stamps build welfare dependency. Three quarters of the beneficiaries leave the program following remarriage, increasing the adults in the household, decreasing the number of persons in the household, or increasing their income by just \$500. These are some facts to consider as your church celebrates Hunger Action Sunday on Nov. 24, while Congress continues to chop away at benefits.

OH NO! – Miffed that he didn't get the part of Joseph in the Sunday school Christmas pageant, little Andy was only somewhat mollified to be the innkeeper. The big day arrived and when Joseph knocked on the door asking if there was any room at the inn, Andy boomed out, “Sure, there is lots of room. Come on in.” His thespian rival was prepared, however. He looked in the door and turned to his wife. “This place is a dump. I wouldn't stay here. Come on Mary, let's bunk in at the stable.”